Bread & baking / Germany

German Pumpernickel

Dense, midnight-dark, and profoundly complex — this Westphalian rye brick steams for sixteen hours until every grain is saturated with malt depth, subtle sourdough tang, and an undercurrent of dark chocolate and coffee that has no parallel in other breads.

Time 1440 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % Coarse rye meal (pumpernickel grind)
- ☐ 90 % Boiling water
- ☐ 2 % Fine salt
- ☐ 5 % Dark malt extract or blackstrap molasses
- ☐ 30 % Whole rye berries (soaked overnight)
- ☐ 20 % Rye sourdough starter (100% hydration)
- ☐ 1 % Caraway seeds

Let's make it.

01 In a large heatproof bowl, combine the coarse rye meal and the pre-soaked whole rye berries. Pour the boiling water over both and stir vigorously until the rye meal has absorbed all the water. The mixture will look like a very thick, sticky porridge — almost like wet concrete. Cover tightly and let stand at room temperature for 1 hour. This scalding step gelatinizes the rye starches, kickstarts enzymatic breakdown of the complex rye sugars that become the bread's distinctive malt-dark sweetness, and softens the whole berries.

02 Once the soaked grain has cooled to below 35 C (check with your wrist), add the rye sourdough starter, salt, caraway seeds, and dark malt extract or molasses. Stir everything together vigorously with a heavy wooden spoon or stiff spatula until completely uniform. This is not a dough in the conventional sense — there is no gluten network to develop. It is a thick, dense batter that barely holds a shape. The color will be very dark brown. Taste: it should be savory, subtly sweet, malty, and smell complex.

03 Line a small loaf tin (approximately 20 x 10 cm) with parchment on all sides. Grease the parchment lightly. Spoon the pumpernickel dough into the tin, pressing firmly into the corners with a wet spatula or wet hands to eliminate air pockets. Smooth the top flat. Tap the tin firmly on the counter several times to release trapped bubbles. The tin should be filled to within 1 cm of the top. Cover tightly with an oiled piece of foil, crimped tightly around the rim to trap steam during baking.

04 Preheat the oven to 120 C (250 F). Place the covered loaf tin inside a deep roasting pan. Pour boiling water into the roasting pan to reach halfway up the sides of the loaf tin — this creates the steam environment essential for pumpernickel. Bake covered with foil for 16 hours. Yes, sixteen hours. The low heat and steam slowly caramelize the rye sugars through the Maillard reaction and enzymatic browning — this is what creates the characteristic near-black color and complex, malt-chocolate flavor without any added colorants. After 16 hours, remove the foil, raise oven to 180 C (350 F), and bake uncovered for 30 minutes to set the crust. Cool completely in the tin before unmolding. Slice paper-thin — pumpernickel is best the day after baking.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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